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 THE MERCHANT

Rnam rgyal རྣམ་རྒྱལ།

A long time ago, a distinguished merchant, Tshong dpon nor bu bzang po and 1,500 of his companions, were on their way to their home in the Land of Snows. As they passed a wilderness of infertile hills and desert stretching far into the horizon.

Yaks and horses struggled as the sun burnt their skins, and their feet sank deep into the sand, making every step increasingly difficult. Only the camels looked comfortable and kept moving forward easily.

Suddenly, a windstorm blew in from the west, covering the sky with low-hanging dark clouds. "Be careful! A black, evil wind is coming!" shouted Tshong dpon nor bu bzang po.

His words were the last ones they heard, as everyone was swept up by the wind and thrown into another world, the West Siren Region. When they woke from deep unconsciousness, they saw that they were surrounded by sirens who looked strikingly beautiful, sexy, and strong, but also demon-like. They laughed, shouted, and danced. Soon, all the merchants had a woman of their own. They were excited at first, but soon tired of fulfilling the sirens' insatiable desire.

Tshong dpon nor bu bzang po and his fellows were exhausted from working hard all day and entertaining the women all night.

One day, Tshong dpon nor bu bzang po heard moaning from a corner of a building and crept closer to investigate. Women with sharp, long tongues were licking an old man who was bleeding, as the excited women lapped up his blood. After the sirens left, Tshong dpon nor bu bzang po crept near the old man and asked, "What happened? Where are you from?"

"I was brought here by the storm. This place is the origin of evil. These women have no love, only desire. When you get old, they will suck your blood," the old man said.

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 Rnam rgyal. 2017. The Merchant. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 47:142-147.

Tshong dpon nor bu bzang po left the old man and prayed to Guru Pad ma 'byung gnas. That night he dreamed of an old woman who told him, "The day after tomorrow a huge white horse will roll on the sand near the river. You and the other men must pray to your great *bla ma*, rush to the horse without doubt, ride, hold on to its hair, touch the horse, or at the very least, have faith that the horse will take you back to your own land. You mustn't look back at this evil land or you will be abandoned by the holy horse."

An evil woman woke Tshong dpon nor bu bzang po early the next morning and told him to do his usual work - taking care of babies that were the offspring of the sirens and the captive men. When Tshong dpon nor bu bzang po was able, he secretly told his fellows about the old man and his dream. When he dreamt the same dream the next night, he told his fellows they must pray to Guru Pad ma 'byung gnas as instructed in the dream.

The next morning, all the men went to work and constantly watched the riverbank, hoping to see the white horse. Suddenly, the large horse was rolling on the sand. Praying, they all rushed to the horse. Though all the men were unable to ride or touch the horse, they all prayed and put their trust in the horse consequently, they were all taken away from the evil world that had been their prison.

However, one man forgot the warning and looked back. He saw the evil women killing the babies and shouting, "We will kill all the babies if you don't return!" Then the man began to fall. He landed on sand and was not badly hurt, but he soon became hungry and could find nothing to eat.

After walking a long time, he encountered a big frog. The man caught the frog, but he had no fire and did not want to eat it raw, so he put it in a stone hole and waited. Soon, he heard many horses neighing and other, strange creatures coming out of the sea. The sea creatures approached him and asked, "Have you seen our sea princess? If you find her, we will give you whatever you ask for."

"Do you have fire? I need to cook a big frog," the man said, taking the frog out of the stone.

"That is our princess!" exclaimed the sea creatures, bowing to the big frog. The sea creatures then urged the man to visit their kingdom, "Sir, if you stay in our kingdom for three years, we will treat you very well."

"No, thank you, I only wish to return to my own land," the man said.

"Then stay for three months, and we will give you whatever you like," the creatures said. ...

Finally, the man agreed to come for one day. As soon as he shut his eyes, he was taken to the Sea Kingdom. Musicians made beautiful music, and the king and his subjects welcomed him. He was intoxicated by the marvelous scenery, the delicious seafood, the beautiful sea maids, and precious sea treasures.

Three years passed before he remembered his desire to leave the sea kingdom. When the king offered him a parting gift, the man visited a famous wise man and asked him what he should take from the king.

The wise man told to take him to take a piece of black tent cloth near the stove, a piece of yak horn below the ladder, and a flowery hen in the chicken coop.

The king agreed and the man was immediately returned to his own land with the three gifts. He walked all day toward his village until he fell asleep under his black tent cloth.

The next morning, he found he was under a very large tent. He could not find his yak horn, but when he gazed through the tent door, he saw hundreds of sheep and yaks on the grassland.

Leaving the flowery hen in the tent, he went out and herded his livestock. At noon, when he returned to the tent, he found cooked food. Day after day, he herded animals and found very good cooked food in the tent.

One morning, he left as usual, but then hid near the tent and watched. He saw the flowery hen become bigger and then a beautiful girl took off the hen's feathers and began preparing food.

The man rushed inside the tent, grabbed the feathers, and threw them into the stove.

"It's too early to burn them," said the beauty.

The man lived happily with his beautiful wife and until the king heard about the beauty and came to see her. Lust grew in the king's heart and finally, he called the man to the palace, and said, "We will compete for the beauty. Each of us must throw one plate of seeds on the floor and the one who can pick them all up first will be the winner. The beauty will be his," the king said.

When the man returned home and told his wife, she said, "I told you that it was too early to burn my feathers. Now you must go to the sea kingdom and ask my family for a magic box."

The man did what his wife advised and then took the magic box to the palace. When the king ordered the wager to begin, a group of people started quickly picking up the king's seeds.

When the man opened his box, a thousand hens flew out and picked up his seeds in just a few moments. The king thus lost the wager but, refusing to accept defeat, said, "There are two small hills covered with trees near here. Each of us must cut all the wood from the foot of the hill to the top. The one who finishes first is the winner."

When the man came back home and asked his wife what he should do, she said, "Now, you must borrow the magic box of axes from my family."

The man went to the sea bank and called to his wife's family, asking for the box of axes. When the box appeared, the man took it to the foot of one hill as the king instructed. As soon as the man opened the box, 100,000 men with axes appeared and asked what they should cut.

The man nervously said, "Cut the trees and the king."

In just an instant, the ax men cut all the wood and the king into pieces. The man thus won the wager and kept his wife. There was no more trouble until one day, when they were working together in

the tent, the man began pestering his wife to invite her father for dinner.

"You should not invite my father, but you may invite my mother," said his wife. "It is very inconvenient to invite my father and it is also dangerous for you. If you invite my mother, she only needs a piece of small wool carpet for a seat and a small pot of butter tea for dinner. But if you insist on inviting my father, you must prepare a giant vat of fresh milk."

The man filled a very big vat full of milk and hid in the dark quietly as his wife had instructed. Soon, a giant serpent broke through the surface of the sea with such force that this single leap carried the giant sea creature through the village and to the home of his daughter and son-in-law. The serpent made three circles around the house and stuck its head in through a window, where it immediately stretched out its long, tongue and lapped up all the milk.

The man could not control himself and said, "My father-in-law is extremely powerful and handsome."

The serpent raised its head and opened his mouth, ready to swallow the man.

"Please, Father, he is my husband. Forgive him," said his wife. Then, the serpent withdrew its head, went back to the sea, and never returned.

After several months, the stubborn man said, "You can use your magic and be more beautiful."

"I already am the most beautiful woman in the world," his wife replied.

"I want you to become even more beautiful," he insisted.

The next morning, the woman sadly went into the courtyard, sympathetically gazed at the man, and then turned into a beautiful yellow snake, slithered into the sea, and never returned.

#### NON-ENGLISH TERMS

bla ma བླ་མ།

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gu ru pad ma 'byung gnas གུ་རུ་པད་མ་འབྱུང་གནས།  
 rnam rgyal རྣམ་རྒྱལ།  
 tshong dpon nor bu bzang po ཚོང་དཔོན་ནོར་བུ་བཟང་པོ།